

VZCZCXRO1291
RR RUEHAG RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLZ
DE RUEHHE #0122/01 0401148
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 091148Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY HELSINKI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1487
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HELSINKI 000122

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AGRICULTURE FOR FAS/DLP, FAS/ITP, FAS/ICD

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ETRD](#) [EAGR](#) [USTR](#) [TBIO](#) [FI](#)
SUBJECT: AVIAN FLU: ADDRESSING AI-RELATED IMPORT
RESTRICTIONS ON POULTRY

REF: SECSTATE 216147

¶1. The following is Embassy Helsinki's responses to reftel regarding avian influenza (AI)-related import restrictions on U.S. poultry.

POULTRY BAN

¶2. Finland bans the import of poultry from highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) affected countries, in accordance with EU guidelines: Croatia, Turkey, Russia, Romania, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, North Korea, Thailand, Laos, Pakistan and Vietnam. In addition, the ban was expanded on January 1, 2006 to prohibit imports of untreated feathers and parts thereof from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

¶3. The European Commission extended the ban on imports of captive live birds--other than poultry for commercial purposes--from third countries belonging to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) Regional Commission, including the United States, until May 31, 2006. Restrictions on the movement of birds accompanying their owners (pet birds) from third countries, including the United States, were also extended until May 31, 2006.

IMPORTS

¶4. Poultry imports to Finland from the U.S. are almost non-existent. In 1997, the EU imposed a ban on the use of anti-microbial treatments for sanitizing poultry carcasses, which effectively halted U.S. poultry exports to the EU. According to the Finnish Board of Customs, Finland imported from the U.S. 2,100 live baby chickens (for breeding purposes) and 330 live adult chickens (for a total value of approximately USD 132,000) between January-November 2005.

¶5. In addition to the EU's ban on the use of anti-microbial treatments, imports of poultry to Finland are also hampered by Finland's strict salmonella regulations. In its EU accession, Finland received a derogation allowing it to apply stricter salmonella controls than other EU member countries. Finland was granted additional salmonella guarantees covering trade in fresh meat from bovines and hogs, fresh poultry meat and table eggs which were extended to minced meat. All consignments containing fresh meat, meat preparations or minced meat (with the exception of heat-treated meats) are subject to salmonella control. The purpose of the salmonella guarantee (or Certificate of Conformance) is to provide consumer protection. Legislation

reversing the current EU policy has not been drafted so far.

¶6. In 2005, Finland imported about 1.7 million kilograms of poultry meat, corresponding to about eight percent of total consumption. Imported poultry comes mostly from Europe, and Brazil. Finland is self sufficient in eggs.

DEMAND AND SUPPLY

¶7. There have been no changes in the demand for--or supply and price of--poultry products in the local market due to avian influenza concerns, according to Sirpa Rinne, Communications Manager for Finnish Food and Drink Industries' Federation (FFDIF). This may be due in part to the Ministry of Agriculture's public awareness campaigns on food safety that have resulted in high levels of consumer confidence. Additionally, many are comforted by Finland's hygiene requirements (and the Salmonella control program), which they consider to be among the strictest in the world.

¶8. The National Food Agency of Finland has repeatedly stated that there is no need to reduce the consumption of poultry meat and eggs in Finland and that there is no epidemiological evidence of avian influenza being transmitted to humans through food. It has reiterated that the disease is most probably contracted from live, infected birds, rather than from poultry meat or egg consumption. The H5N1 avian influenza virus has not been found in Finland or in any nearby regions.

¶9. Only eggs produced in Finland are sold in the Finnish

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market and no salmonella has been found in them. In poultry meat, salmonella has been found on very rare occasions. Finland's salmonella control program involves extensive testing of egg and poultry production units for salmonella. Every hen flock from which eggs are delivered for packing is tested for salmonella several times during egg laying. The same principles are applied to the prevention of avian influenza. Salmonella was not found in any Finnish poultry farms in 2005.

¶10. A local newspaper reported in mid January 2006 that the French restaurant chain Sodexho limited the use of raw eggs in food preparation in Finland because of the risk of avian influenza. Sodexho later disputed the claim, stating that it had instituted new guidelines on eggs due to the risk of salmonella. Previously, breakfasts at its restaurants included eggs which were boiled for three minutes. Now eggs are boiled for at least five minutes. Sodexho runs about 500 restaurants in Finland. The company predominantly operates in staff and student cafeterias in Finland.

ANIMAL DISEASE

¶11. Finland has managed to keep the animal disease situation under control exceptionally well. In the past 30 years, no animal diseases classified as dangerous by OIE have been detected in Finnish livestock. The responsibility for keeping Finland free from contagious animal diseases belongs totally to the farmers and the food production chain. In order to reduce the risk of diseases in animal and food production, voluntary practices have been adopted.

¶12. The Association for Animal Disease Prevention (ETT) was founded in July 1994 to provide guidance on risk management to farmers and importers and to regulate the import of livestock, semen, embryos and animal feed. In practice, the members of the Association enter into agreements with their producers. In the meat producing sector, for example, the

producer undertakes to deliver only animals born in Finland, or imported animals supervised by the Association.

AVIAN INFLUENZA PREPAREDNESS

¶13. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is preparing--in cooperation with other ministries--a comprehensive Avian influenza preparedness plan that will be presented to the Permanent Secretaries' meeting by February 15, 2006. Additionally, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is preparing a comprehensive preparedness plan in case of a human influenza pandemic that will be presented to the Permanent Secretaries' meeting by March 13, 2006. Preparedness rehearsals will be organized on March 9 and April 20.

NEW GUIDELINES

¶14. The threat of avian influenza is leading to new guidelines to poultry farmers in Finland. Under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry regulations that are under preparation, free-range chickens would have to be kept inside in 160 municipalities that have been identified as risk-zones, during the annual spring migration of birds to Finland (March 15 to May 31). The new guidelines are based on EU Commission decisions 2005/731/EU, 2005/734/EU, 2005/745/EU, 2005/855/EU.

¶15. The feeding places of outdoor birds, such as ostriches, would have to be constructed in a manner that keeps them separated from wild birds. The aim of the regulations is to prevent interaction between wild birds and poultry, in order to minimize the risk of the spread of the avian influenza virus to domesticated birds.

¶16. Sirpa Kiviruu of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry noted that risk areas include poultry farms that are near places where migratory birds convene and rest. She pointed to locations along Finland's coast as well as areas in eastern Finland where there are duck and goose farms. The new rules, which will come into force in March when the spring migration begins, will have the greatest impact on free-range chicken farms, where the chickens are usually let outside whenever the weather permits. Turkeys and chickens will be mostly unaffected by the precautions as

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they are generally raised indoors. Ostriches, which need space to run, are to be provided food in protected enclosures.

¶17. Veterinary officials will be given detailed directions on how to act in the event of an avian influenza outbreak or another easily spread poultry disease. All provinces have corresponding province-specific directions. The preparedness plan includes guidelines for veterinary treatment.

¶18. Post has provided Ref talking points to the Ministry of Agriculture.

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